J·A·MITCHELL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

AMOS JUDD.

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That First Affair

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AN ENORMOUS BUNCH OF FLOWERS IN HIS TRUNK

That First Affair

And Other Sketches

By

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That First Affair

That First Affair

IT is bad enough to be alone in a big house, and there is yet more solitude, the poets tell us, in being alone in a great city; but the hero of this simple scandal was alone on the surface of the earth, the only man, absolutely single and unique, — solitary, — all by himself.

Of course there were animals, but no record exists of dog or cat or parrot; and what hope for boon companionship with the mylodon, the ichthyosaurus, or the ornithiohnites giganteus?

But, worst of all, he had no memories, for he started already brought up. He had never been a boy. Selkirk and other solitaries, either in heart or trousers' pocket, bore memories of mother, or proof of maiden's love; but this young man knew not mother, maid, or memories, and had never seen a pair of trousers.

His education was limited, as history had not yet begun. Botany was trying her first experiments. Reading, writing, and geography were still unborn; and, thus far, no vulgar fractions had shed their blight upon a peaceful earth. However, being the first of the kind, and never having seen his like, he probably regarded this as the usual condition of affairs; the proper thing, in fact. But the goings on of other animals could not fail to start him on a line of thought that was sure to be upsetting. They were pairing off in twos, and with their individual families seemed to get the upper hand

of an unpleasant isolation that threatened to make his own existence a melancholy failure. And doubly depressing was the gradual discovery that while among the other animals there were at least two of a kind, thus rendering these partnerships an easy business, for him there seemed no such hope. Day after day he searched, but found no biped similar to himself. Meeting, one tranquil eve, a palæotherium with his bride, he asked the happy groom where he found his mate, and if, in that locality, there were brides in human shape. "No," the palæotherium answered, "I have seen them nowhere; but off to the south I passed maidens of the gorilla family who walk on their hind legs and use their front paws just as you do; and they also bear a certain resemblance in physiognomy."

"Yes; I know those maidens," replied the solitary one; "but somehow they fail to fascinate me. They are

hasty-tempered and too muscular. I should never be master in my own house; and they are such restless climbers! No; home would not be home with those girls."

Two squirrels, newly wedded, threw nuts at him as he wandered melancholy by, and twitted him on living by himself. "Get a girl," cried the groom, "and go to housekeeping. There's nothing like it, really!"

And later a mastodon, hurrying ponderously, yet joyfully along, with an enormous bunch of flowers in his trunk, nearly trampled the disconsolate bachelor beneath his feet.

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed. "I came within an ace of walking on you."

"I wish you had."

"Why, what has happened?"

"Oh, nothing has happened, and nothing ever will!"

The big traveller failed to understand, but his business that morning was too

interesting for delays. Being of a sympathetic nature, however, he made one attempt at consolation.

"Let me put you on my back, and I'll take you to my wedding. You shall be best man."

The invitation was declined, but incidents of this kind only increased the bitterness of a lonely spirit, and aggravated a situation already painful. The most dismal hours of all were during those regular intervals when the light went out, leaving the earth in darkness. This joyless condition lasted many hours, and was only alleviated by a smaller and much colder luminary than the sun, which, as the lone one gazed upon it, filled him with uncontrollable longings. The evening zephyrs breathed exasperating secrets, always of a tender and mysterious nature. And during these dusky hours the frogs and turtles intensified his woe by their vociferous courtships.

But a surprise was awaiting him, and

it came in a novel way. Early one morning, as he lay upon the grass, conversing with a skylark who was hunting worms for his family breakfast, the bird remarked, —

"I suppose you feed your little ones on quite different food."

"I have no little ones."

"Oh, too bad! All dead?"

"No; I never had any."

"Your wife 's alive?"

"Never had any."

"So you 're a bachelor! Well, it 's a shame for such a good-looking chap to go to waste. You ought to marry, and do it while you 're young."

The youth sat up and shook his hair from his face with an angry movement.

"I would if I could, and quick enough!"

The lark laughed. "Would if you could! Why, any girl would have you."

"But there is n't any girl."

"Oh, fiddle!"

WHEN THE LIGHT WENT OUT, LEAVING THE EARTH IN DARKNESS

"But there is n't, and never has been!"

The bird looked earnestly at him, and came a little nearer. "That is a serious oversight," he said impressively, his head to one side.

"Serious! I should say it was!"

"Look here," said the lark, in a lower tone and coming closer still, "there have been several important errors in this creation, and the one you mention just caps the climax. While of little importance to the world at large, I can see that for you, personally, it is terribly aggravating. Now, I won't mention names, but there are several creatures hereabouts that should never be allowed in a first-class garden. It all comes from a reprehensible carelessness in the supervision."

"That 's just what I think," said the young man.

"If, for instance," continued the skylark, "there were fewer mosquitoes and more girls, it would be a far more attractive garden."

"Would n't it, though!"

"And suppose all the mosquitoes were girls, what a different kind of a time you would have!"

"Don't talk about it;" and the youth rolled over upon the turf and muttered all the wicked words he knew.

The sympathy of the skylark was aroused, also his anger, and he exclaimed, "What 's the use of a man without a girl?"

"None!"

"Why, you have no home!"

"No; I sleep in a new one every night."

"Now, marriage is rife in this garden, and I can't imagine why you should be shut out. You are as good as the rest of us, at least, you appear so."

There was a silence, during which both were thinking. It was broken by the lark, who said, in a reflective tone, —

"It must be a mistake: just a stupid blunder. There 's nothing to punish

you for. You have n't led a fast life, have you, or been bad in any way ? "

" A fast life ! " exclaimed the man, " fast on what ? There is no one to gamble with ; I never saw a woman ; there 's nothing to drink but water, and I am only a week old, anyway ! "

The skylark smiled. " Well," he said, " I believe it 's simply a mistake, and that the powers above have forgotten all about you. I will do the best I can to advertise the fact, and it may reach their ears. You just wait here a minute."

Thereupon he spread his wings and soared aloft. As he arose toward the clouds he sang, in clear, far-reaching notes, —

" Not a woman in the world ! "

Higher and higher he went, until, to the anxious bachelor, he became a tiny speck in the sky, the note growing fainter all the while. At last the blue ether closed in about him and shut the messenger from sight.

A long time he was gone, but he finally returned, and out of breath.

"Well, I have spread it through the heavens," he said; "and if there is justice anywhere, you ought to get it."

The very next day, rather early in the afternoon, our hero, yielding to a heavier drowsiness than usual, reclined in the cool shade of a fern, — an antediluvian fern about a hundred feet in height, — and fell straightway into a deep slumber. When he awoke the surprise was there! She was close beside him, leaning over and gazing down into his face, and he, in unspeakable rapture, looked up into another pair of human eyes. Fearing it a dream, he blinked and looked again. It surely was the prayed-for girl! Her eyes, surprised and timid; the delicate contour of her face and neck; the luxuriant locks that grazed his cheek as she bent forward, — all filled him with a gentle ecstasy.

He smiled; she returned the smile,

and, either from embarrassment or alarm, edged further away. Still sitting among the flowers, she watched him intently, as if trying to comprehend the situation. As for him, so great was his joy that he found no words to express it. He continued, however, to manifest his intense delight by a series of welcoming smiles, but these at last were disconcerting to the maiden, compelling her to turn away in some confusion. For it must be remembered that this was not only her first appearance in any society, but it had come with unprecedented suddenness. Her wardrobe, being a thing of the future, might also have troubled her under different circumstances, but at this informal period no fashions had been set in clothing; in fact, no standards of any kind were as yet established for the guidance of beginners.

She seemed even more amazed than he, and stared at everything about her in a charming bewilderment.

"Where did you come from?" he finally asked.

"I am sure I don't know!" she answered; "I just found myself here."

Her voice was gentler, more melodious than his own. He put his hand to his side as if something were missing, but his face expressed no regret.

"You are very beautiful! far more interesting than anything in this garden."

"Thank you," she replied, with a blush; "I have never seen myself, but it is very kind of you to think so."

"I am glad enough you have come," he continued. "I have lived here some days, and it's dull being alone."

"Where are the others?" she asked.

"The other animals?"

"The other people."

"There are no others."

She seemed disappointed. But this brief conversation had given her more confidence in herself, and she replied, with a suspicious look, "So you are the only man!"

"Yes."

Now this was an unacceptable truth to a belle who was making a brilliant *début*.

"How do you know that?"

"Because I have n't seen any, or heard of any; and I have inquired far and near."

"Have you been everywhere yourself?" and then, as her eyes swept the distant hills she added, "It seems quite a place! There must be *some* variety in the way of men."

"Well, it 's what all the animals tell me, and the birds too: and some of them are tremendous travellers."

As he gazed in admiration upon this new companion, he could not conceal his contentment in being able to make such a reply. But she was evidently far from satisfied. After a pause, during which she caused him to feel that he was taking an ignoble advantage of a trusting girl, she inquired, without looking toward him, "Then what on earth do you do with yourself?"

"Oh, nothing much: generally as the others do."

"Then there *are* others?"

"I mean the other animals."

"And how do they pass the time?"

"Oh, stroll about and eat things, mostly fruit and berries; and take naps."

"What a life!"

"It *is* dull."

"Dull! I should die!"

"There are some fine views."

But she made no reply, and there was another silence in which he felt her contempt. At last, in a consoling manner he remarked, "But then *you* will have *me!*"

"Really!"

He blushed and tried to assert himself against a foolish diffidence that was constantly possessing him ever since he had met this person.

"What I mean is that you will have one companion, such as it is, while I have been all alone by myself."

She put her hand to her mouth as if to conceal a yawn, then sighed as she asked, —

"And the neighbors? Are they pleasant people?"

"But there *are* none, I say."

"Not hereabouts, perhaps, but further away. Off there, or there," she exclaimed nervously, pointing in different directions.

"There is nobody anywhere. I have inquired and hunted, and we are the only ones."

"Impossible!" and she arose to her feet with a look of alarm. "I can't believe it. It is terribly inconsiderate; and I am sure it 's unusual."

"Unusual!" he repeated; "why, what is the usual custom?"

"I don't know, but it seems queer. Are you sure it 's all right? I was never in such a position before."

"But you never were in any position before," he answered with a smile.

She made no reply, simply expressing

by her manner an increased distrust, and strolled slowly away.

He hastened after and did his best to make her cheerful: he told her how delicious was the fruit; how refreshing to lie down when tired; of the delightful heat of the sun when the wind blew cold, and how welcome the cooling wind and the shadowy places when the sun was over-hot. But she paid little attention, and appeared thoroughly depressed, turning away as if mankind had ceased to interest. She gazed about at the sky, the trees, the birds and butterflies, fixing her eyes, at last, with an absent look, upon a towering megatherium nibbling tree-tops in the distance.

She plucked a flower and held it to her nostrils, then studied it in admiration.

"I can show you some that are much prettier than that," he remarked in the tone of a man of the world who has travelled extensively and seen much.

HE DID HIS BEST TO MAKE HER CHEERFUL

"Did you make this one?" she asked.

"No!"

"Did you make all the rest?"

"All what?"

"Everything," and with a little wave of her hand she indicated the trees and the distant hills.

"No, that was all finished when I came."

And pointing upward to the great white clouds floating majestically across the heavens, "And did n t you arrange those, either?"

"No!" And he saw in her face that the awe which he at first inspired was gone forever.

Passing her hands through the long tresses that hung about her shoulders, at first in an idle way, she at last began to gather them into a definite shape. "Your hair is very beautiful," he remarked. "How fast it must have grown; and you so young!"

She looked up at his own head and asked, after hesitating a moment,

"What happened to yours? Did something bite it off?"

"No; it was never any longer."

"That's too bad!"

"Oh, I don't care; I supposed it was the regular thing until you turned up."

"I wish I could see my own face. I have no idea how I look."

"You look like me in a general way; but you are far more beautiful of course, as I was only an experiment."

"How do you know how you look?"

"I have seen my reflection in water."

This was quite exciting; and she showed a livelier interest than in any subject they had yet approached. So together they started off to find the mirror.

Beneath a certain apple-tree he paused a moment, and told her this was the forbidden fruit; that of all else in the garden they could take what they wished,

but if they tasted this there would be a serious punishment. Then, continuing their walk, he brought her to a quiet nook by a river's bank, and there, surprised and delighted, she gazed upon a fresh young face smiling back at her from the water.

"Why, how lovely! I am not at all like you, and my hair is beautiful — simply beautiful!"

Then she began to arrange this hair in different fashions, trying new effects, he watching her like a creature beneath a spell. At last, turning toward him, a little color in her cheeks, she inquired with a smile of various meanings, "How many men did you say there are in the world?"

"One."

"That 's a great many, is n't it?"

"You think one is a great many!"

"It seems so just now."

He laughed and strolled away. She called after him, "And I will let you know when you are needed."

After a while, when tired of her own face and of rearranging her hair, she looked about for other pleasures. The world was young, and so was she, and there were fresh surprises on every side, — in the colors and perfumes of the flowers, in the clouds, the birds, and the whispering trees. For a happy period, no one knows how long, she played about, until at last, throwing herself upon a shady bank to rest a little, she recognized in the branches above her head the apples of the forbidden tree. But she was a good girl — so far — and resisted a temptation — quite a strong temptation, just to know how it tasted. As thus she lay, a languor came stealing through her brain; her eyelids shut out the light; her senses seemed to float away, and then — all was as nothing.

From this sleep she was gently awakened by the pressure of a diminutive hand upon her heart, and warm lips against her own. Opening her eyes,

at first slowly, and then wider in alarm, she looked upon a curious little being who leaned over her with a mischievous smile upon his cherubic face. He was short, very plump, and quite a handsome boy. She sat up and pushed him back, a look both of fear and indignation in her face. But he continued to smile, and said, —

"Oh, don't be angry. You will understand it later. You don't know me yet."

"No, I do not."

"I am the serpent."

"The serpent?"

"Yes. Do I look it?"

She did not answer, as she felt he was not serious, and she had begun to fear him. In his face and manner there was a recklessness and audacity that augmented her distrust; moreover, his lips were amorous and his eyes were bold. The impression given was of

an impulsive, happy person, warm and open-hearted perhaps, but who loved the Devil and was full thereof. Had he worn a halo, it would not have been straight upon his head, but cocked to one side, and he would have doffed it to every girl he met.

"Yes," he went on, his hands upon his hips; "I am the tempter, the thing that is to bring disgrace upon you,— upon you, the mother of the human race."

His speech was meaningless, at least to her, and she began to regard him as some evil spirit.

"Are you a man?" she whispered.

"A man? No; I am the essence of all men,—of the millions yet unborn. I am the sap and soul of human life, the realization of lovers' dreams. I am the absorbing and resistless passion; the one undying thing; the everlasting joy and torture. That's what I am!"

He smiled as he spoke, yet there

was enough of earnestness to convince his listener that he was something of importance. The more she studied him the more she yielded to an indefinable bewitchment. He seemed to exercise a dangerous spell, and she looked uneasily about. Her thoughts flew to the man, whose absence she now regretted, and she remembered him with a warmer interest and a deeper longing than she had yet experienced.

"You kind of half know what love is, don't you?" exclaimed her new acquaintance. "Whenever you think of that fellow you feel this way." And, reaching out his arms, he moved them slowly up and down, wiggling every finger; "and it goes tingling all through you, up your spine, along your drunken nerves, and into your nice little heart. It brings the color to your cheeks and the light of Heaven to your

eyes. Oh, it is the big thing of creation!" and then, as she tried to hide her embarrassment by a careless smile, finally putting her hands before her face, he laughed aloud, a triumphant, mocking laugh, threw himself upon the grass, and repeated, as he rolled over and over among the flowers, "What fun this is!"

Then he sat up and said with a smile, — an exasperating smile of superior wisdom, —

"Tell me honestly what you think of him?"

In spite of herself, the color came into her cheeks.

"Who?"

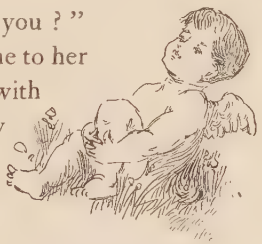
"Who?" he repeated in a jeering tone. "Who, indeed? There are so many."

"You are an impudent little thing."

"Worse than that," he replied. "I am the wicked thing that tempted Eve;" and he hunched up his shoulders and rubbed his hands in a kind of reckless glee.

"That tempted whom?"

"You. But tell me honestly if the world is not pleasanter since you took that nap. Isn't the sky bluer, the air softer? Aren't the flowers more fragrant? and isn't your heart a heap sight fuller since I had the honor of awakening you?"



Again the color came to her cheeks as she replied, with a frown, "I don't know why I should talk about it to every stranger who comes along."

"True; but you are not likely to encounter many strangers, and, besides, I am an exceptional person. I am an institution by myself, — a whole principle, in fact, — and a huge one, too."

"You are here for mischief, I am sure of that."

He laughed again. "For love and trouble, that's what I am here for."

"Must they go together?"

"Well, yes; I suppose they must.

You see love requires that two shall be in it."

She nodded.

Then, with a solemn shake of his head, "There 's trouble right away."

She reflected a moment, then replied, "I don't see why."

"Because one at least is in love. If the man, for instance, could pine away for love of himself, for what is already his; if he could be satisfied with holding his own hand, sitting in his own lap, breathing love into his own ear, and after all, perhaps, changing his mind and throwing himself over at the end, — you can see how much suffering would be avoided. And the same with a woman. No; it 's having two that will lead to complications."

"But how do you know all this when nothing has happened, — before anything is tried?"

"By eating that fruit," he answered pointing to the branches above her head.

"By the way, have an apple," and he proffered one.

But she pushed it away. "That is the tree of knowledge, the forbidden fruit."

"Oh, come now! what do apples grow for? You will never have any fun, unless you know enough to take it. It's the best fruit in the garden. Do you want to be a brainless old goody, and never know what life is — to say nothing of blighting the hopes of the only lover in the world? Eat it, and trust me. I can furnish you more fun and tragedy, more poetry and life, than the deepest ignorance can ever offer. Besides, you won't get another such chance for a finished education with so little trouble."

She was puzzled. There were too many new ideas in this, and they came rapidly for a brain not three hours old.

"What do you mean?"

"This being the tree of knowledge, it follows that the more you eat the more you will know; and you will know things

you ought n't to know, which is considerable sport, as you can imagine."

Although she smiled and nodded in approval she could not avoid a suspicion that, for inexperienced maidens, he was not the safest guide.

"But we are commanded not to eat it, and to disobey would be wrong."

"Look here," he said, cocking his head to one side and half closing his eyes. "You are inclined to be too superior. Now, beware of an excess of virtue. It is a good thing, like water, purifying while you are in it, but too much of it becomes the chill of death. Take my advice and eat that apple. It will bring a scrap of wisdom, and that man will like you all the better for being a little cleverer than himself."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure."

She still hesitated, but finally bit into it cautiously, and made a little face.

"Why, it is n't as good as it looks! It is bitter, and yet," after another bite, — "it has a sweet taste."

Then she finished the whole apple and, as she tossed aside the core, inquired, —

"If I eat another shall I be wiser still?"

"Yes."

"Then give me another."

But he squatted upon the grass in front of her and said, —

"Just wait a minute, and hear a word before you go on. In the first place, wisdom and fun are two different things. Now, if you eat too many apples you will be too wise to fall in love with that man."

"I don't see why!" she exclaimed. "I should love him all the same. He is not a fool."

"Yes, he is, or he would be with you now."

"But I sent him off."

"What did you say to him?"

She remembered her clever little speech, and smiled. "I told him one man was too many."

"One man too many for a woman! Well, that would make a holoptychius laugh."

Seeing that she failed to comprehend, he edged a little nearer and laid a hand on her knee.

"Excuse me; but you are still very simple in certain directions. However, if you eat any more of these apples you will be too far ahead of the man."

"But he can eat the apples too."

The fatling shook his head.

"What you want from that man is an absorbing love, is it not?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And if that love were so tempestuous and all-conquering as to blind his reason you would not complain."

"No, never!"

"Well, it hurts me to say it, but

excessive wisdom is not a safe companion for that kind of love."

"Then he shall never taste an apple!"

"You had better let him have one, — just one, — or it may all end in a kind of toleration on your part, which is also dangerous. You don't want him *too* dull."

"Well, he shall eat one; but only *one*."

"You are a sensible girl. And there is one thing more I ought to tell you; that is, that you will have to leave this garden, now that you have eaten the apple."

This alarmed her, and she exclaimed reproachfully, "And you made me do it!"

"Yes; but you never could have lived without it. You see this garden is laid out exclusively for frigid old maids, — hard-headed, apathetic old maids, — who abominate men. Now, I would n't live in it if I could, and I know that

man would n't either. And you are not the girl to be happy in here all by yourself, with us fellows outside."

"No, I certainly am not!"

"Good for you! I knew you were not. So there is no damage done. The fun begins earlier, that's all. Now good-by, for I must leave you; but I shall be within call if you ever need me;" and with a knowing smile he added, "Don't be cruel to him."

And he skipped away, half running, half flying, singing as he went; and she noticed that birds and animals pricked up their ears as if his song was interesting, certain of them following the singer, and always in pairs. She wondered who and what he was, and had little doubt of his being a person of importance.

And she was right. He was a person of considerable importance. And

ever since that day — which was so long ago that no human being pretends to reckon it — he has led mankind the liveliest jig, upsetting the natural course of history, dispensing joy and agony with reckless waste, and making hopeless fools of men and women of every class and station, and of all ages, colors and conditions. And he is at it still.

He was hardly out of sight before she began upon a second apple. That clever little stranger might be correct in theory but her instinct told her, that in any relations between the sexes, there could be no possible disadvantage to the woman if she were a trifle wiser than the man. After the second apple she realized a mental change — a quicker insight, a clearer comprehension, and, not least, a splendid confidence in herself that alone was worth the price of all. She felt able to cope with any masculine adversary. And that second apple easily explains — at

least in this writer's opinion — certain mental differences between men and women that have flourished ever since that day.

When the man returned, uncertain of his reception, for he had heard no call, he found the belle of the garden reclining beneath the apple-tree, weaving a sash of vine-leaves. For, among the various ideas that had come to her since partaking of the fruit, was a yearning for personal decoration, — that desire to wear something which has since developed into such unreasoning dimensions. Throwing himself upon the grass at her feet, he began with his old argument, that they marry at once, like the rest of the world, and go to housekeeping. For a time she made no answer, fearing he might suspect, either by her language or by her manner, that she was not the simple maid he had known but an hour ago.

At last she moved her lips, raised her eyebrows, and held her head a trifle to

one side, as if trying to think well of a poor suggestion.

"Come," he urged, "what do you say? It is a splendid idea."

"There is no hurry."

"As well do it now as later."

"As later? You speak as if it were sure to happen sometime; but I don't know why!"

"Because everybody else is married, birds, beasts and fishes, everything, from the elephant to the ant. It 's a law of nature, an example we certainly ought to follow; and a fine one, too!"

"But there is not the least hurry, and you must remember that I never met you before to-day. However, I will think about it and tell you later."

"Oh, don't say that. It is mournful to be alone. Why, the world is a different thing since you came into it."

"Thank you; but I would like to look about a little before I settle down. I have seen nothing yet."

"We 'll see it all on our wedding journey. I will take you everywhere. Come, please say yes."

She shook her head. "This is all dreadfully sudden; and how do I know that your love for me is serious."

"Indeed it is!"

"Am I worth a sacrifice?"

"Try me."

"Would you rather live alone in this beautiful garden, or with me outside?"

"With you outside, a thousand times over!" and he sat up with uplifted hand, as if taking an oath.

"Then eat this," and she took an apple from the ground beside her and held it toward him.

It was rather sudden, and he had a wholesome reverence for the garden authorities.

"No," he said with a shake of his head; "I will not do that, for we can both live here by letting the apples alone."

"But I have already eaten one."

"You have!" and he looked seriously alarmed.

"I have," she answered calmly, and in her voice there was a shade of contempt. "I hardly supposed your devotion would stand a very serious test."

"You did n't? Then you made a mistake. I will eat a dozen!" and he took half the apple at a single bite.

"No! you must eat but one!"

"Why? How many did you eat?"

She hesitated, then compromised with truth, and answered, as she looked calmly into his eyes, "One."

He finished the apple, then looked up with a smile. "Now are you satisfied?"

"Yes, partly. You have given a proof of your sincerity, but you cannot expect me to fall in love at such very short notice and with the first man I meet."

"Why not? You can't do better, no matter how long you wait;" and

he added with a smile, "I am your only chance."

"A tempting assortment to pick from, but I must have time to consider. We never met before, and I know nothing whatever about you. Who are your parents? Where do they live, and what sort of people are they?"

For a moment he was disconcerted. Then he smiled as he answered, "My parents, I fancy, are much like your own."

"My own! Why, have I parents?"

"Have you never seen them?"

"No."

"Then probably you have n't any."

"Is it customary?" she inquired.

"Is what customary?"

"To have parents?"

"Not that I know of, but there would be no harm in them, I think. Young animals, I notice, depend entirely on their parents; but you and I were never young, so we did n't need them."

"I must say it seems more respectable in a way. A man without parents is a terrible mystery. You may be some awful animal in disguise; how do I know? Is n't there some one to refer me to? Have you no relations, no antecedents whatever?"

"No more than you have yourself."

This style of conversation was evidently beginning to annoy the suitor; but she could not resist having a little more fun with him, and replied, with exasperating sweetness, —

"But I don't ask you to marry me. I should certainly be rather hasty, to say the least, if I presented myself to the first person I encountered, when others are surely coming later."

"Other women may come too," he retorted.

"Then you can have one;" with which reply she arose and walked away. He remained seated upon the grass, also pretending to be more

offended than he was, and thus came the first lovers' quarrel, similar in motive, execution, and result to the unnumbered millions that have followed since.

The cruel maiden disappeared among the antediluvian plants, not halting until well out of sight, and then she turned and peered through the leaves, and watched him. And when, a moment later, he started after her, she ran further into the forest seeking out-of-the-way places, that his search might be in vain. There was a sense of triumph in this, and a pleasant excitement, as the apples had taught her the importance of not yielding too easily. Of time she took no thought, until in sudden terror she realized what was going on about her. It had all been so gradual as to escape her notice; but now the trees, the sky, and all the flowers began to lose their color, and those at a distance disappeared entirely. They had vanished and ceased to exist.

At least, so it seemed to one of her brief experience, and there was no one to explain.

The big luminary had disappeared behind a line of purple mountains that seemed, in that direction, to mark the edges of the world. She saw with alarm that a peculiar change was creeping over the earth. The air was damper; the resplendent, many-colored world she had known so short a time ago had died away. In place of the bright blue sky with its shining clouds, there came, enveloping all things, a solid mass of threatening black, through which myriads of little eyes were glittering with a cold, unearthly light. She trod on unfamiliar things, and they tickled the soles of her tender, inexperienced feet. Twigs and branches and mysterious things seemed to reach out and touch her, like wicked fingers, and she shrunk and grew weaker with every step. She dared not call aloud, for he might be far away, and these

other things would hear her voice and might eat her up.

At last, sinking to the ground, she wept from fear, for whatever existed was surely coming to an end. Crouching at the mercy of unknown things, with hope and courage gone, the approaching footsteps of some invisible creature brought a climax to her terror. But this terror changed suddenly to an overwhelming happiness as she recognized the outline of a human form.

With a joyful cry she ran toward him. The trembling figure found a welcome refuge in the encircling arms, and the encircling arms were exceeding glad to hold her.

The next morning, as they were finishing a simple but beatific breakfast, a dignified messenger, with wings and snowy draperies, appeared before them and gave official notice that they must quit the garden. But the apples had opened two pairs of eyes, and the youth

marched out with head erect and a smiling face, for he knew he carried with him the flower of the universe, the only one of her kind.

As for that loveless garden, nobody knows where it is.

And nobody cares.

Mrs. Lofter's Ride

Mrs. Lofter's Ride

AS Mrs. Chillingworth Lofter descended the grand staircase of her stately home, on the afternoon of November 2, she presented a sumptuous picture of dignity and patrician elegance, of complacency and of countless dollars. No descendant of a hundred earls could be more aggressively aristocratic or more politely insolent than this daughter of four generations of solid and increasing millions. With features of perfect regularity, with an excellent figure and a commanding carriage, she was sometimes beautiful and always impressive. At the time of the brief adventure to be narrated, Mrs. Chillingworth Lofter was forty-one years of age. She looked younger.

The soothing and ever-present consciousness of being born a Topping was a wonderful preservative of youth. Although a little heavier than she herself desired, the well-distributed weight only added to her dignity.

She was attired for afternoon calls. Every detail of her toilet was in perfect taste, and of unconsidered expense. Through the stained-glass window above her head, the sunlight, as if subdued and quivering at the hallowed touch, illumined in its reverent passage the united arms of the Lofters and the Toppings.

As she swept leisurely toward the door, it opened wide, and the liveried servant bowed his head in solemn adoration, — just enough and not too far, — and she passed through and out. With a careless word to the footman she entered the brougham. He closed the door, touched his hat, and scrambled upon the box. In so doing, he seemed to have discarded his trousers, but this

was owing to the extreme tightness of his creamy breeches, and to a luminous quality they possessed when in motion. In another moment the sparkling equipage was rolling down the Avenue. To certain occupants of other stylish equipages, and to occasional pedestrians whose gentility was publicly acknowledged, she gave nods of recognition. These salutations were masterpieces, being nicely graded from the cordial greeting for other immortals down to the perfunctory and chilling inclination toward the social struggler whose future was still uncertain; and all were executed with skill and precision.

Her first call was in Washington Square, after which, on her way uptown, she stopped for a moment to be seen at a wedding then occurring at Grace Church. Upon entering the vestibule of this temple, she found herself approaching a man by the name of Connor. She had met him once or twice at the house of a friend whose guests

were not always of the quality she most respected. This Mr. Connor, for instance, if one could judge from his somewhat diffident manner and careless raiment, was not accustomed to the refining influences of fashionable society. Knowing no reason why the acquaintance should be continued, she gave him on this, as on previous occasions, the most arctic nod in her repertoire; and it was accompanied with a look that to a sensitive soul would have laid a heavy frost on any budding aspirations. How he took it concerned her little, and she looked indifferently beyond him, as, with her chin in the air, she brushed calmly by.

On leaving the church, some moments later, she was approached by her footman, whose anxious face gave warning of disaster. One of the horses had a fit, — blind staggers, he thought, — and the coachman, with another man, was trying to get him home. Should he call a carriage?

No, she would walk a little, then possibly take a hansom at Union Square; and she started up Broadway.

It was a beautiful afternoon, and she found walking a pleasure, but her attire was somewhat too heavy and too rich for the street. Besides, she had not the time. Consulting a memorandum in her card-case, West Thirty-third Street proved the nearest on her list; decidedly too far to walk. Public cabs were out of the question, being hideously vulgar; and one never knew who was in them last. At that moment a cable-car went by, and it certainly looked fresh and clean. It would take her within a block of where she wished to go. Then, within her, came a reckless resolve.

At the corner of Twelfth Street she signalled one of these conveyances. It stopped, and she proceeded leisurely and with her usual impressiveness to get aboard. Behind her was another person, of whose existence she was un-

aware. As our heroine stepped upon the platform the conductor, who seemed in a hurry, and was, possibly, ignorant of her maiden name and of her social position, placed his hand between her shoulders, according to the custom of his kind, and gently hastened her pace. With an angry face she partially turned, to avoid the pollution, and shot a crushing glance at the offender. But he was looking elsewhere, and failed to receive it. Then, as she was about to enter the car, she found herself face to face with Mr. Connor. He was standing on the platform directly in front of her, and their eyes met.

On the instant she determined to commit an act that might as well be accomplished now as later. As the gentleman raised his hand toward his hat, her eyes moved slowly from his face horizontally, with glacial indifference, and with no sign of recognition. A polar bear would have shivered beneath its baleful rays. The deed was

brutal, perhaps, but it was executed with a frigidity and a self-possession that rendered it a work of art. Mr. Connor, with a sudden color in his cheeks, stopped his hand on its upward journey and stroked his mustache. Possibly he was unaccustomed to just this manner of having advice delivered.

She entered the car, followed by the passenger who also had just come aboard. Her entrance was majestic. Twenty pairs of eyes at once were fixed upon her with a pleasant interest: those of the men in admiration; those of the women in envy and in awe. She brought with her, into this every-day scene, the atmosphere of a higher life, — an atmosphere of pride and of costly things; of dainty nourishment; of marble mansions and of bath-tubs lined with gold. The very rustle of her clothes seemed to indicate that the garments beneath were even richer than the outer glories.

In the centre of the car she stopped

and turned about, facing, as she did so, the other new arrival. He was a citizen of African descent. His somewhat showy apparel indicated a love of color that was not fettered by convention. A sporty suit of reverberating checks, whose startling yellow suggested a suspicion that its first owner lacked the courage to exhibit it himself, was enhanced by an emerald-green cravat, held by a scarf-ring of bygone fashion. The striking feature of this scarf-ring was its gigantic ruby, which, if honest, was worth about thirty thousand dollars. But grave doubts as to the genuineness of this stone were invited by the ragged edges of the adjacent collar, which was not only conspicuously high, but very much soiled. Neither did his manifestly ancient hat, which had attained to its present smoothness by the application of a moistened towel, seem a proper travelling companion for a jewel of such unusual value. His face, however, was real; and as Mrs. Chilling-

worth Lofter confronted him, he smiled pleasantly and made no effort to conceal his admiration. She was disgusted and looked freezingly beyond him.

The car started forward, slowly, but with that rapidly increasing speed so misleading to the upright traveller. Mrs. Lofter leaned deferentially toward her showy *vis-à-vis*, and laid her hands caressingly upon his shoulders. They then bounded gracefully toward the door, with a step that was neither a waltz nor a polka, but which was executed in such perfect time that the ordinary observer would have suspected a previous rehearsal. Although differing widely in color and in social standing, these two travellers were, for the time being, certainly one in movement. This movement was perhaps more of a galop than a polka, and although harmoniously executed became a little too hasty at the finish. The exhibition was brought to a close by her partner's back coming in violent contact with the jamb

of the door. Although the dance itself was practically over, Mrs. Lofter continued for a moment to press heavily against her dusky partner, and to one unaccustomed to these conveyances her action might appear of questionable taste even if prompted by the warmest affection. But to those familiar with the Broadway cable-cars there was nothing unusual in this performance, except, perhaps, the costly attire of the leading lady, and this added a certain novelty and richness to the general effect. As Mrs. Lofter, hot with indignation, released herself and stepped away from the grinning object of her caresses, a seat was offered which she gladly accepted. Once in it, she had leisure to look about.

Although inwardly revolting against the sickening episode in which, to her everlasting humiliation, she had just taken so conspicuous a part, her glance swept the row of opposite faces with haughty composure. She bit her lips,

and there was defiance in her eyes, as she noticed a general smile throughout the car. Having no sense of humor herself, this cheerfulness seemed the acme of human insolence. All were either smiling or on the edge of it. A coarse-looking man in a corner, with curly hair and a fur collar, who looked like a ticket-agent for a circus, smiled boldly upon her with an open grin. Even the pale-faced little girl with the hollow eyes and phantom legs smiled timidly over the enormous box that rested in her lap. One person, an over-dressed girl, with her beau, actually tittered aloud. But the most insupportable of all, that which irritated Mrs. Lofter beyond her powers of endurance, was an expression of pity and regret upon the face of a massive female who sat directly in front of her. This heavy, honest Irish face was elongated with compassion, and the kind blue eyes, as they looked mournfully in her own, seemed on the verge of tears.

They told of an inward lamentation that such a dignified lady should become an object of ridicule. Mrs. Lofter was unable to suppress an angry flush that flew to her face, but she behaved with magnificent composure, moving her eyes indifferently along the row of happy faces that seemed drawn up before her like a squadron on parade. It was well to let these wretches know that, although she and they might chance to occupy the same public conveyance, there existed a gulf so immeasurably vast that there could never be anything in common between them, not even her own anger. Upon the benevolent Hibernian opposite she lingered with an icy gaze that would have frozen the life-blood of any human being whose self-forgetfulness had been less.

But why sit here and endure the vulgar insolence of this street-car *canaille?* She rose to quit the scene. Fortune, however, seemed to have abandoned her, at least for that afternoon.

A more unpropitious moment was never selected for a dignified retreat. As she arose, her Irish *vis-à-vis* stood up, also with intent to leave the car. She had passed her street in the excitement of the little dance with which the grand lady had just favored the company. It was at this point that the car, having reached the sharp curve above Fourteenth Street, gave viciously, and without warning, a sudden wrench, throwing its head in one direction and its tail in another. The two women clinched, not in anger, but in a friendly tussle of the Græco-Roman style. It promised to be the usual catch-as-catch-can struggle, although they held each other with a nervous frenzy not usual with professionals. The movement of the car compelled Mrs. Lofter to throw herself forward with a headlong fury that was evidently unexpected, for it thrust her ponderous but amiable adversary, with sickening force, upon the lap of an elderly gentleman who was perusing

his afternoon paper. As the news of the day was jammed in crackling folds about his head, the visitor's stalwart back pressed painfully against his nose, displacing his spectacles and knocking his hat to one side. In vain he struggled to pull the paper from his eyes, that he might realize the nature of the avalanche that was grinding him beneath its suffocating weight. But the enormous and seemingly immovable mass arose, and floated away as suddenly as it had come.

Mrs. Lofter had the underhold, and was the more agile of the two, but her companion possessed harder muscles, and also a breadth of beam that became a factor of tremendous importance in a struggle where time is limited. As the car, with an unearthly yell from the machinery about its wheels, veered from northwest by west to a northeast course, the athletic washerwoman regained her equilibrium with a celerity that aroused the enthusiasm of every

passenger; and although in reality only trying to free herself from her richly attired assailant, she appeared first to shake her and wrench her about the aisle, and then, after lifting her from the floor, to slam her upon the opposite seat with vindictive rage.

As Mrs. Lofter landed, she quivered from head to toe with the suddenness of the shock. Every stitch and button of her apparel seemed to have loosened. Pale from anger and outraged pride, she pressed her lips and made a superhuman effort to control herself. With outward calmness she assured herself, with a touch, that her bonnet was on her head, and then, with a downward glance, that her clothing had not been torn from her body.

In the mean time the other woman murmured an apology, stopped the car, and alighted. But of this, Mrs. Lofter had failed to take notice. She was too much occupied with her own sensations to observe the movements of the

vulgar herd. Never in her life had she assisted in such a degrading scene. Never again would she put herself in a position where contact would be possible with these dregs of humanity, this insufferable street-car rabble.

A loud guffaw from the seat opposite brought a flush to her cheeks, and a gleam of anger to the contemptuous eyes. There sat, in a convulsion of mirth, a tall, thin-faced, red-bearded man, with an enormous Roman nose. His light-blue eyes were fixed merrily upon her own. One hand was slapping his knee in the very abandon of ecstasy. The other he pressed hard against his vest in the hope of preserving the cohesion of his interior. His laugh was so hearty and contagious that if Mrs. Lofter had been a little more human she might possibly have smiled herself. She then noticed, in looking scornfully over the passengers, that all were laughing. The nice old gentleman, who a moment before had been disconcerted

by the Hibernian catapult, was trying in vain to conceal his amusement. Two well-dressed girls were holding their handkerchiefs to their faces, and squirming with uncontrollable glee. Even the anxious, over-worked conductor stood in the doorway with a cheerful grin. Every eye of the confronting faces was fixed merrily upon herself, and she saw that the entire company had surrendered to an offensive gayety which, instead of dying out, seemed to increase and amplify. Never had she dreamed of such barbarous manners! Of course, she knew they were a common lot, ill-bred, and hopelessly vulgar, or they would never be riding in a street-car; but this persistent, brutal insolence, this inhuman disregard for others' feelings, was more than a surprise. It was a shock. Could it be possible they had combined to affront her? It required all her self-possession to look haughtily along the line, and let them guess at the infinity of her contempt.

Suddenly her lips parted; the hot blood rushed to her face; her eyes became wider open. Was she sitting on a pair of — what? They moved! A little voice down behind her shoulders piped gently up and seemed to say:

"I beg your pardon, madam, but — "

Mrs. Lofter rose to her feet as if driven by electricity. Wheeling about, she looked down upon an overdressed little youth whose mouth was quivering in a pitiable effort to maintain a smile. His face was hotter than her own.

It would seem that if any apology was due it should emanate from the person who, in a public place and without invitation, had occupied the lap of a harmless citizen. But the degradation of her surroundings had driven from Mrs. Lofter's mind all memory of conventional courtesies. As if the youth had not fully atoned for his uncommitted sin, her cold eyes lingered for a second upon his changing face, and the glance was so laden with dis-

dain that the mortifying color came rushing to his cheeks.

More of this would be unbearable.

With imperious majesty she motioned the conductor to stop the car, and he pulled the bell. She stepped toward the door, not crestfallen, like a victim in retreat, but with firm eyes and head erect, proudly and with perfect composure, as a being so far above the encircling clay that the intervening space could not be measured by any standard within their ignoble comprehension.

But fortune seemed only waiting for a chance to smite her on the other cheek.

The car stopped; she alighted from the loathsome conveyance and stepped calmly toward the sidewalk. Before reaching it, however, the conductor called after her. She turned, and he held up his finger. What new affront was hidden beneath this gesture she made no effort to discover.

But again he spoke, and this time

his voice was raised above the din of passing carriages, —

"Your fare, lady!"

With an unpleasant chill she remembered that not a cent was in her immediate possession; that she held only a card-case, and not even a pocket to her gown; then, as a fit culmination to this degrading adventure, she saw Mr. Connor speak a word to the conductor and place a coin in his hand. In doing so he raised his hat, but without looking toward her. Mrs. Lofter's face became first a fiery crimson, then pale with anger.

Outwardly cool, inwardly at a white heat, she moved up Broadway in icy majesty. Just above Twentieth Street she saw coming toward her one of her most cherished friends; one of the few women whom she thoroughly envied. Miss Winifred Taileur was exceptionally pretty, enormously wealthy, and the sister-in-law of titled foreigners. One of these purchases was an English

duke; the other a Marquis of la Haute Noblesse. The duke was coarse in his manners, and a physical wreck. The marquis was a professional gambler. But in the heart of Mrs. Chillingworth Lofter the family who had achieved a nobleman was forever sanctified, whatever the individual's physical pollution or moral dearth. For Miss Winifred Tailleur she cherished a respect that was akin to adoration. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that this friend's social standing was yet more dazzling than her own.

An agonizing chill drew our heroine's lips together as she perceived, to her horror, that Winifred was accompanied by the inevitable Connor. Moreover, they appeared on excellent terms. Could she believe her eyes? An intimacy between a Tailleur and this unknown thing!

Miss Winifred came beaming toward her with effusive greeting, for they had not met since April.

"Why, Helen! I am so glad to see you! How well you look! Such a splendid color!" Then, after further salutations, and turning partly about, "Let me introduce —"

But Mr. Connor had strolled away and was waiting farther on.

"Why, the brute! He did n't wait. I must tell you, Helen," and a most conventional and proper little blush came reluctantly to her cheeks. "You are the first to know it, outside the family, but Mr. Connor and I —"

Mrs. Lofter almost staggered beneath the news. Her friend misinterpreted the emotion.

"I knew you would be interested, and I am sure you will be great friends. He is a love, and is certain to come into the title within a year or two."

"Title!" gasped Mrs. Lofter. "What title?"

"Why, I thought you knew. He is a nephew of Lord Blathers, the swellest peer in Ireland — and the sickest."

And Winifred's smile was one of sorrow and of hope.

When they parted, a moment later, Mrs. Lofter felt in no condition for making calls. She hurried home; and as her fellow-travellers of the cable-car were fresh in her mind, she burned her gloves, had her wrap hung out for an airing, and she herself took a very hot bath.

Then, sufficiently purified in body to approach her Creator, she knelt with bowed head upon a *prie-dieu* that had belonged to Catherine de Médicis, and for which her husband had paid twenty thousand francs. Her prayer, while ostensibly in thankfulness for her many blessings, was, if the Deity to whom it was addressed had cared to read between the lines, a respectful but firm demand for a more watchful guardianship over the choicer lambkins of his flock. While too well-bred to openly rebuke a Beneficent Being for His recent shortcomings, she felt that a plain

statement concerning her recent desecration was a pious duty. And while wishing the common herd no immediate punishment for their backslidings, it would certainly be well if they were suddenly brought to a proper respect for higher things.

Whether this prayer miscarried, from being obscurely worded, Mrs. Lofter never learned, but no reward for her martyrdom was received that evening. The martyrdom was, on the contrary, prolonged until a late hour, as they dined at the Bondenwaters, and the gentleman who took her out to dinner was the future nobleman whose repugnance and contempt she had so ably won that afternoon, — he who had defrayed the expenses of the most mortifying and debasing exhibition ever given by a Topping.

Two Portraits

Two Portraits

I

IN the old-fashioned library of an old-fashioned house a young man, near an open window, sat writing at a desk. He had pleasant eyes and a pleasant mouth, and the sunburnt face seemed all the browner from its contrast with the light, almost straw-colored hair.

After folding his letter he sealed and directed the envelope and affixed a stamp; then he leaned back with a look of relief. Although a good son, this letter to his mother had been an unwelcome effort, as the present visit to his grandfather was absolutely without incident; and, besides, she knew more of the house, the neighbors, and the old gentleman himself than any other person could ever tell her. Nev-

ertheless, he had covered four pages, and felt now like receiving his reward; like doing something foolish, something to be ashamed of later. He could go to the village, but it offered no dissipations beyond tepid beer and bad cigars, and for these he felt no yearnings.

For a young man just out of college the world has little to teach, and as he thought of the gouty grandfather in the chamber above, and realized that this visit was to continue four days longer, he began to regret that creation, in its final results, should prove so flat and uneventful.

Again, for the twentieth time, he looked across the library to the portrait of a girl in an old-fashioned hat, who seemed forever on the point of smiling, yet never did it. She, whoever she was, with her black hair and tranquil eyes, had a gentle, somewhat sad expression, and yet, about the mouth there was a suggestion of mischief. And the smile seemed so very imminent that he

THE PORTRAIT OF A GIRL IN AN OLD-FASHIONED HAT

disliked to turn away for fear of missing it. He not only smiled himself, as he had often done before, as a form of encouragement, but this time he leaned forward and addressed her, —

"Please do it. Just once!"

But the prayer was not answered. He looked out the window with the melancholy gaze of a disappointed lover; then a foolish look came over his face; the look of a foolish man with a foolish idea who has resolved upon a foolish thing. He took half a sheet of note-paper and raised his pen to write. What he wrote seemed to come with an effort: —

"If there is in this world a girl like you,
Then count me a lover, stanch and true."

Looking over at the portrait, he said in a very low tone and with an apologetic air, "I am not a poet, you know, but the sentiment is correct."

Folding it twice, until it became quite a narrow strip, he stepped over to the silent girl and pushed his mes-

sage between the canvas and the frame. This brought relief. The foolish thing was done. Perhaps it was more foolish than the conditions required, but without defining it he felt that in matters of love no barriers are more chilling than caution and common-sense.

"And, besides," he muttered, as his gaze rested affectionately upon the eyes that seemed so very near a smile, "it is no one's business but our own, and I know you will never tell."

He stepped back and gravely threw a kiss to the face above him, then politely, and with becoming deference, retreated toward the door.

As he ascended the stairs he made a bold resolve. He would ask the old gentleman, point-blank, who the painting represented. It would be a natural question. Yet, on the other hand, he knew his grandfather never alluded to it, and he also knew, from the housekeeper, that the portrait had never appeared in the house until after his

grandmother's death; and ever since it had held the place of honor in the library.

Between the two men, as they sat facing each other, the physical resemblance was striking. Both were tall and slight, with narrow faces, long noses, and pointed chins. Their eyes were of the same shade of blue, and upon both heads the stiff, straight hair was alike, except that with the older man the original straw-color had faded to a yellowish gray. But a closer look at the two faces revealed a fundamental difference in expression. With the grandfather there were unmistakable indications of an unamiable and aggressive spirit, and of that despotic intolerance that is so often the result of long habits of authority. The old man himself was not aware of these distinctions, and it gave him constant pleasure to believe, as he looked upon the frank, sunny face of his grandson, that the only difference was that of

years. Whereas the youth, although taking no pride in his own appearance, felt a mild regret that as an older man he should look precisely like his grandfather. But these fears were unfounded. In him were the well-springs of undying cheerfulness; of that perpetual youth which years can never dry.

"How is your foot, grandfather? Any better?"

"No. Yes, perhaps it is. Did you write to your mother?"

"Yes, sir. Four pages."

"And probably forgot everything she wants to know."

"No, sir, not everything. I told her about —"

"Oh, that's all right. Don't tell me, for I know it already." And he shook his head in a manner that was intended to convey the impression of a playful spirit. Seeing a promising condition for experiment, the young man ventured his question.

"Grandfather, who is that pretty girl in the old-fashioned hat above the library mantel? I never saw a more interesting face."

The tyrannical blue eyes rested upon his own for an instant, as if in indecision. "She is an English girl I knew a long time ago, when I was your age. We were great friends, and day after to-morrow when you leave I shall give you a letter to her. She and her daughter live a little way from London. And when you get to England next month I want you to go there, whether you feel like it or not."

"All right, sir. I promise. And did she give you that life-size painting of herself?"

"Yes."

"She must have been very fond of you."

"Possibly."

There was a pause, during which they both looked out the window, over the orchard to the meadows beyond.

A happy thought entered the head of the investigator. Perhaps this daughter was the image of her mother! He hesitated, then asked, "Is there more than one daughter?"

"Only one."

Then, in an offhand, indifferent way, "Does she resemble the portrait?"

"Not at all. She is rather pretty, but she may have changed. It is forty years since I saw her."

Forty years! Cyrus Harding felt himself a broken-hearted man; and a very foolish one.

"Oh, of course. How stupid!"

"Stupid? Why stupid!"

There was a blush on the grandson's face, and he turned it toward the window.

"I was only thinking she was younger."

There was another pause, and each seemed lost in his separate revery. At last the younger man, whose thoughts were still with the portrait, asked, in

a gentle, somewhat absent manner, his eyes still fixed upon the meadows, —

"Were you in love with each other?"

As no answer came, he looked toward his ancestor, and he realized his mistake. The chin was raised, the lips compressed, two hostile eyes were fixed coldly upon him, while nervous fingers tapped angrily on the table.

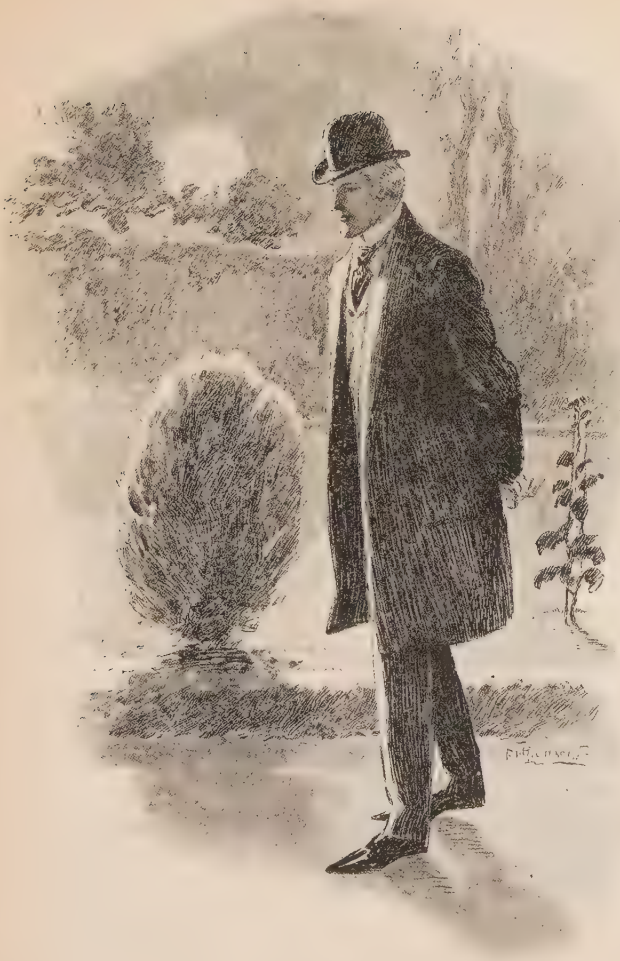
"Cyrus," he said, slowly, in a voice tremulous with suppressed wrath, "if you live a hundred years longer you may learn that a little tact is a more gentlemanly quality than your brazen impudence. Try it."

He waved his hand as if to end the interview. The young man rose and stammered an apology as he moved toward the door; he said he spoke without thinking, and was sincerely sorry to have given offence.

"That is all right," said the old gentleman, with a perfunctory, unforgiving smile; "I was hasty myself. Excuse me."

Two hours later, after his lonely supper, he strolled out into the garden, which was also lonely, and where all the melancholy little sounds of a summer evening seemed the utterances of other and yet more lonely spirits. The voice of a whippoorwill from a neighboring grove betrayed the wavering courage of a forsaken soul. And the moon, as she rose above the orchard, gazed sadly upon him, as if she too, in her eternal solitude, yearned for a companionship of which she found no promise. He strolled dreamily about the old garden and encouraged the belief that if the original of that exasperating portrait were only here, the world would be always interesting; then with a bitter smile he murmured, "Grandad and I don't seem to have much luck with our favorite girls."

After a few turns he entered the house, and without intention directed his footsteps toward the library. A sleepy lamp upon the table illumined



HE STROLLED DREAMILY ABOUT THE OLD GARDEN

the space immediately around it, but left the rest of the room in obscurity. Cyrus threw himself upon a sofa, and, with his eyes upon the portrait, now barely visible in the shadowy light, was soon lost in a peaceful revery.

But he could see that she was looking at him. And such a spell was wrought by the silence and the gloom that if, in answer to his own imaginings, the lips had parted and she had spoken, he would hardly have been surprised. An audible conversation between the old-fashioned bookcase and the tall clock ticking in the corner would have been in perfect harmony with the mysterious, half-living atmosphere that enveloped the various objects and himself. And these objects were all of a character to meet a ghost halfway. Every article was of a bygone fashion, and, save usage and repairs, the little library was precisely as it existed when his grandfather's father had furnished the house over seventy years ago.

Everything was old, — the paper on the walls, the curtains, the carpet, the pictures, and all the furniture. The only signs of youth were this girl and himself. And she was fifty !

As he gazed upon her face in the everlasting hope that the impossible might occur, he detected a little white corner of his note projecting beyond the edge of the frame. Had he been so careless ? Could he have left it in such a clumsy way that the first comer might discover it ? And when he recalled what a silly note it was, he jumped from the sofa and pulled it out. As he held the paper between his fingers to tear it into bits, it seemed thinner and of a different texture than when he folded it three hours ago ; and he took it to the light.

This certainly was another kind of paper, finer, more transparent, and even doubled in a different fashion ! And was it a mild perfume that came to his nostrils in the unfolding ? He started

when he saw the writing, — a daintier hand than his own, more carefully written, and with a finer pen.

"Thank you; but I have no mind
For a lover so perversely blind."

He dropped it upon the table and returned hastily to the picture.

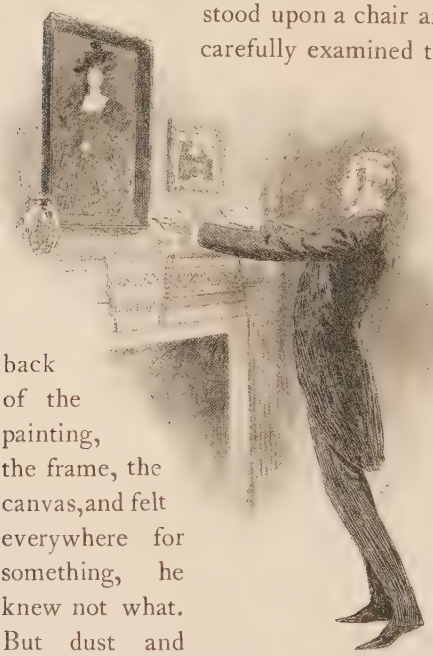
"Blind?" he asked in an anxious whisper. "Why do you say that? Why am I blind?"

The eyes, through the dim light, looked down into his own and came nearer smiling than ever before. They also seemed more mischievous, and as he bent nearer to catch the answer they took a frightened look, as if annoyed.

Beneath the lamp he re-read the note. The lines seemed fainter; and as he gazed, they grew dimmer and dimmer, slowly fading from his sight, until, upon the white surface of the paper, there was no trace of writing. Returning to the portrait, he demanded, —

"What is it I ought to see? Why not tell me?"

But no answer came. Then, removing the shade from the lamp, he stood upon a chair and carefully examined the back of the painting, the frame, the canvas, and felt everywhere for something, he knew not what. But dust and disappointment were all he found.



WHAT IS IT I OUGHT TO SEE?
WHY NOT TELL ME?

Returning to the table, he sat down and wrote, —

"Why do you say I am blind? Why give such a meaningless answer when you know I am in earnest? For me your face shall always be the first and dearest.

"Please answer. C. H."

This note, like its predecessor, was carefully folded, then tucked in the same place, between the canvas and the frame. A moment later, in his most engaging manner, he bowed gracefully to the silent girl and left the room.

The next morning, at the earliest opportunity, with a respectful, although a conquering air, he approached the portrait. There was in his manner a certain brusqueness and assurance whose object was to remind the lady that she was in honor bound, by their previous intercourse, to refrain from disappointing him. With outward calm, but with inward nervousness, he drew a folded paper from its hiding-place.

It was his own epistle. He frowned at the dark eyes that looked tranquilly into his own; and never had they seemed so unresponsive. To judge

from their calm, unrecognizing stare, he might have been a stranger. If they told him anything, they told him he had been too familiar; and as they bore every appearance of reading his own consciousness of defeat, a flush came creeping over his face. His own blood was mocking him! And this embarrassment from a picture!

He laughed, but there was no mirth in it. Jamming the note into a pocket, he marched angrily from the room. But in the hall repentance overtook him, and he turned about. He would give her one more chance. If the eyes were plaintive or sad, as he

had often seen them, all would be forgiven. Glancing severely in her direction as he stood in the doorway, he saw, to his mortification, that she had either been laughing or was just going to.

Let her! Who cared? And whistling loudly a tune he hated, he picked up his hat and left the house.

"All for a picture; and of a woman who came within an ace of being my grandmother!"

But late that night, when there was no light in the room and all was so dark that even the eyes of the portrait could not detect him, he shoved his note into its old place between her shoulder and the frame. And there he left it.

II

One month later Cyrus Harding got into a train at the Victoria Station and allowed himself to be dragged from the City of London into the County of Kent. His grandfather's letter had developed into a nuisance of depressing importance now that its presentation was imminent. It was to keep him twenty-four hours from London, where his time was worth something; and all for a useless ceremony of no possible benefit to anybody. That a young man should travel forty miles in a drenching rain to bore an old lady because she once knew his grandfather was a folly for which he could find no justification. His only solace was from the consciousness of his own wisdom in selecting for this errand a day so atrociously uncomfortable that its loss was of small im-

portance. And the storm showed no signs of deserting him. A heavier, wetter, more industrious rain he had never seen.

At the little station where he alighted he found an ancient conveyance, small but unreasonably ponderous, and this he entered. The driver, a very old man, who might have been the brother of the vehicle, knew well the Caine-Vedder house, and headed his dripping horse in an opposite direction from the village whose church tower and picturesque chimneys Cyrus had seen through the rain from the car window.

About a mile from the station they turned from the turnpike into a private driveway. The driveway lay along the edge of a wood, and swept in a long curve around a lawn of several acres, in the centre of which was a stagnant pond. This lawn, or rather field, for it was covered with high, coarse grass,

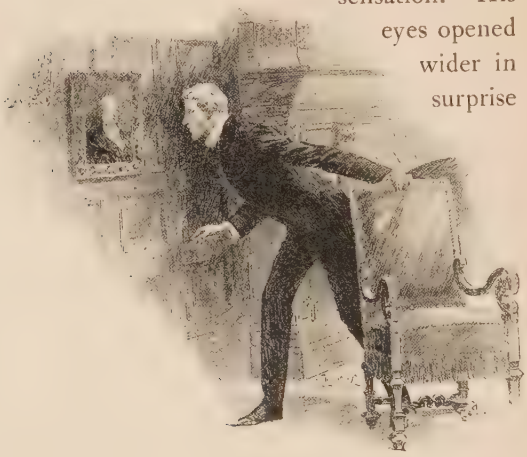
and evidently allowed to take care of itself, afforded an excellent view of a rambling, irregular structure, long, low, of unrelated parts, some of stone and some of brick, with here and there an ivy-covered wall through which the windows were hardly visible.

The door was opened by a venerable

maid, who ushered him into a spacious, quaint old drawing-room. While she went upstairs with his letter of introduction, he amused himself by studying the unusual apartment in which he found himself. It was a long but narrow room, with lofty, deep-embrasured, mullioned windows that looked upon the lawn. His grandfather's house, which heretofore he had considered as the most old-fashioned habitation upon the earth, was, as compared with this, a museum of modern improvements. Here were indications of an antiquity beside which his own homestead was a frivolous babe.

The carved ceiling, the panelled wainscot, white but discolored, that extended to the cornice; the long mantel, the faded tapestry, the curious old portraits, all formed a harmony so solemn and subduing that he shrunk from moving about, for fear of awakening some indefinable thing whose slumbers he might disturb.

As his gaze moved reverentially along the walls, it fell upon a little portrait that caused him an unexpected sensation. His eyes opened wider in surprise



A PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF!

as he looked more carefully to make sure it was no deception.

A portrait of himself!

He arose, and, going nearer, made a closer investigation. His own self was staring calmly back, amiably but with

unfamiliar seriousness, and certainly there was no mistake.

He blinked, then drew his hand across his eyes. His mystification was complete. And there was something weird and upsetting in thus scrutinizing a face so unmistakably his own. He was hopelessly puzzled; but, a moment later, he understood. At home the older people had often spoken of the striking resemblance between his grandfather and himself; so striking was it that at the same age they could have passed for twins. And this, probably, was a portrait he had given to the original of the painting in America. He smiled at this further unfolding of the old gentleman's secret.

The rustling of a gown caused him to wheel suddenly about and to face a second surprise far more upsetting and important than the first.

The portrait in America had come to life and was standing before him!

Young, fresh, with a girlish figure,

and the same eyes; her hair arranged precisely as in the likeness beyond the sea! She returned his look with an expression of astonishment more intense than his own. The lips parted, — those lips whose double curves he knew so well! She uttered a whispered exclamation, then took a backward step, in serious alarm, and groped about with a hand, as if seeking support.

Cyrus, in his own excitement, neglected to remember that this young lady had every reason to believe that she was confronted by the spirit of a youth who had sat for the likeness behind him over fifty years ago.

He came nearer to get a better look, and she retreated step by step, as he approached. Finally, recalling himself, he apologized: —

"I beg your pardon, but I am so familiar with your face — I mean I have seen your portrait so often — that is, a portrait of your grandmother, perhaps, that I was very much surprised."

THE PORTRAIT IN AMERICA HAD COME TO LIFE

Thereupon she recovered her own composure and waved him toward a chair.

"Please be seated;" and she placed herself upon a little sofa some distance away. This extreme formality embarrassed him. Then, partly from habit, and partly from that mental vacuum which visits the best of men at critical moments, he alluded to the weather.

"It is a pleasant day."

She looked toward the storm that was blowing the rain in drenching sheets across the lawn, and answered with a serious face, —

"Yes, it is."

Then there was a pause which she was the first to break.

"My grandmother will be ready to see you in a moment. She is an invalid and seldom comes downstairs."

What a pleasant voice! It was low and soft, and he waited a moment in the hope that she would go on and say something more. Regarding her more

carefully, he was struck anew by the amazing resemblance to the picture. No painter, whatever his skill, could have reproduced with greater faithfulness, or with more precision, the details of the face before him. As she looked up from the folded hands in her lap and encountered his earnest gaze, she seemed surprised and somewhat embarrassed. Ashamed of thus staring her out of countenance, he hastened to retrieve himself.

"It is curious a likeness painted so long ago should bear such a startling resemblance to another person."

Involuntarily her eyes moved to the little portrait near the chimney, then back to the speaker. There certainly was no doubt of the resemblance. The painting was an accurate transcript in color, features, and expression, of his own face, which at that moment was turned toward the window. He was doing his best to think of an appropriate remark. There was something in this

girl's presence that stimulated him to a brilliant effort, yet his head was never so empty.

"Yes, it is quite remarkable," she acquiesced.

Then with a glance in which he intended to convey only as much admiration as was consistent with a first interview, he added, —

"Attractive as it is, however, it falls far short of doing justice to the descendant of the sitter."

She looked at him in surprise. And at this moment he detected, for the first time, that expression he knew so well, as of repressing a smile. For a second the smile became almost perceptible, then disappeared.

"This is a case," he continued, "that proves a portrait can be a truthful likeness, and yet miss the greatest charm of the person whom at the present moment it most resembles."

Again she regarded him with wide-open eyes. She had heard that men

were vain, but for this stupendous, overpowering mixture of simplicity and conceit she was unprepared. To be sure, he was the first American she had ever met, and this inspired her to an heroic effort to consider him from his own point of view.

With his best smile he went on, —

"No face could make a stronger or more lasting impression, for no face that I have ever seen represents so much that is lovable and winning."

Her lips parted for a polite acquiescence, but the voice failed to respond. In this man's complacent vanity there was something so grotesque, so overwhelming and incredible, that her organs of speech suffered a temporary paralysis. She sat facing him in dumb surprise. Cyrus saw this look, but mistook its cause. He now remembered that English girls were considered more simple than their American cousins; that their wits were less nimble and their perceptions duller. She evidently had not

understood him. He must use a heavier hand. Guided by this happy thought, he added, —

"In the portrait, while the hair, the eyes and mouth are all of exquisite beauty, one cannot help feeling, in spite of its wealth of expression, that the artist has not done justice to the living face it so strongly resembles."

She began to be annoyed, and somewhat alarmed. And yet, with her alarm, she felt a sympathy. In spite of his nauseating vanity, the voice and bearing were those of a gentleman, and there was something in his manner that belied the vainglory of his words. Cyrus was quick to perceive that these speeches were unwelcome. Leaning back in his chair, he concluded by saying, —

"Excuse me if my speaking in this way has offended you, but you would understand if you could see the portrait."

"I am familiar with your portrait."

"With *my* portrait?"

"You mean that one, I suppose?"

and she bowed coldly toward the chimney.

Cyrus blushed to the very roots of his straw-colored hair. What an ass she must think him!

"Oh, no! Please don't think that!" he exclaimed, straightening up. "I referred to the portrait of yourself — I mean your grandmother — in America!"

Again he saw the familiar look as if she had just been laughing, or was on the verge of it. This increased his embarrassment, and he began a further explanation. But there was a step in the hall as of a lame person, and with it the rustle of an approaching gown. He felt a serious grudge against her grandmother for arriving at such a moment.

As the old lady entered he looked in vain for some resemblance to the painting in America; but whatever similarity might formerly have existed had evidently long since departed. Even the

features and proportions of the head seemed altered. The upper lip was longer, the whole face heavier, and, it appeared to him, of a harder expression than in the olden days. He made a low bow and advanced to take the hand of welcome when offered.

"Your grandmother says as she is ready to see the gentleman, Miss Ethel, and 'opes he will walk upstairs."

Cyrus straightened up. Another blush, hotter than the first, spread over his face, and he felt it behind his ears as it wandered leisurely to the back of his neck and tingled down his spine.

"Very well," the young lady answered; "we will go up at once."

Cyrus turned his eyes toward Miss Vedder's face. In her own eyes and about the edges of her mouth he found the exasperating look that used to mystify him in the portrait, but now intensified to a positive smile; gentle and evanescent, half mischievous, and evidently enjoyable to the owner. And

this time really there. At this another blush, deeper, hotter, and slower than the last, crawled over his angry face and then, as it were, seated itself to further enjoy the situation. With these ancestral blushes, which only assailed him when least endurable, he had also inherited a hot, sudden little temper; and for the moment he felt a strong desire to slam a door in these women's faces and march out into the storm.

When he fully recovered his senses, he was upstairs in a large, old-fashioned chamber, talking calmly and with outward amiability to the unmistakable original of the portrait. The hair was white, the features changed with passing years; but it was a handsome, kindly, high-bred face, and he felt like offering a humble apology when he compared it with the tough old visage of the housekeeper. Mrs. Caine-Vedder gave him a cordial welcome, was sincerely glad to see him, and insisted upon his promising them a little visit.

HE MADE A LOW BOW

The result was that three days later Cyrus, with his trunk, came down from London for a fortnight's sojourn in this weather-stained, ivy-bound, restful old homestead.

III

In the deep recess of one of the Tudor windows of the drawing-room were seated Cyrus and the granddaughter of the portrait. It was the golden twilight of an October afternoon, that mysterious hour when the human being with a poem in his soul finds it toying with his brain; when proudest hearts yield to the bondage that, since love began, has brought unspeakable happiness or enduring grief.

Then is the hour for care and circumspection; and then is the hour when care and circumspection are offensive to a lover's soul.

The maiden's eyes were turned toward the light, looking over the unkept lawn to the golden band along the western sky. Her thoughts might be many miles away, but the young

man was not deceived by appearances. While she gazed thus absently upon nothing in particular, he, with no assumption of indifference, was studying in beatific content the dainty head and face that seemed unconscious of his existence. But the dark eyes at last turned slowly toward him.

"Is it the custom in America to stare at a girl until she has to leave the room?"

"Yes; when there is nothing else to look at."

"There is your own portrait. It seems to excite your enthusiasm more than anything else in the house."

"Oh, rub it in! You don't mind hitting a man when he's down."

"But you are never down. You are always up."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you are irrepressible. At times almost unendurable."

"Thank you. I wonder if all English girls are so subtle in their praises;

so overflowing with gentleness and tender consideration for others."

"No; but they would be if pursued day after day by obnoxious invaders who insisted upon marrying them in spite of themselves; if from unexpected corners, wherever they went, offers of marriage were perpetually jumping out. Take to-day as a specimen. This morning all the time we rode, and afterwards at golf, then all through the woods to the village and back, the same persistent, sulky, bullying foreigner at my elbow insisting that I shall fall in love with him. And here you are again; and you have been at it for an hour!"

With a long-drawn sigh the haughty little head leaned wearily back against the panelling of the window. Cyrus seemed absorbed in the sunset and made no reply. There was a long pause, which at last she broke by asking:

"Is it getting ready for a storm?"

"Probably. That is the usual condition on this soggy little island."

After another silence he continued:

"Although I shall never see you again, I am glad to have been here."

"Thank you."

"I am glad to have seen with my own eyes a type of woman I had read about, but in whose existence I never believed, — the woman of inviting exterior, still young, yet with a heart too cold and tough for human affection."

"Yes?"

"A parrot or a fat old cat will easily absorb what superfluous love you will ever bestow upon anything outside yourself."

A faint smile came into the face of Miss Ethel Vedder, but Cyrus missed it.

"I suppose," he went on, "you will marry the usual bad-mannered, long-upper-lipped, self-satisfied, dull-witted, brandy-and-soda Englishman."

"If I can catch him."

From his end of the window came a long-drawn sigh, followed by a gen-

tle humming and a poor accompaniment by his fingers on a pane of glass.

"Well, after to-morrow you will be rid of me;" and he arose and strode away from the window. With his hands in his pockets he stood gazing gloomily upon the full-length portrait of a cavalier of the time of Charles the First.

"Who is this mean-faced old fool in pantalets?"

Her eyes turned lazily in that direction.

"A gentleman who never forced his way into private houses to insult the ancestors of his hostess."

Cyrus smiled, and returning to the window resumed his seat, but this time the distance between himself and the lady was considerably less. Leaning forward, he began earnestly,—

"Oh, Ethel—"

"You must n't call me that."

"Why keep this up? You know

YOU MUST N'T CALL ME THAT

I love you sincerely, with my whole soul, as I never — "

"There you go again!" and with a sigh, as from a patient spirit that is finally goaded beyond endurance, she arose and walked away. He followed and stood beside her, near the fire.

"Very well, then, you shall have no more of it. I have annoyed you for the last — "

"Did you do that?" she interrupted in an excited whisper, catching him by the arm and pointing toward the wall.

"Do what?"

"The paper in that frame! Did you put it there?"

He saw something white, like the corner of a note, projecting from the inner edge of the frame that held the little portrait of his grandfather.

"No. I did not."

In her agitation she appeared to forget her antipathy to the young man, and the grasp upon his arm was not relaxed.

"I will tell you something," she went

on, in the same hurried whisper. "No, I won't either;" and withdrawing her hand, she advanced timidly toward the picture, took the paper from its place, and went over to the window. There she read it carefully, once, and then a second time. He had followed her across the room, and as she stood before him in the glow of the fading sunset, another and a deeper glow came creeping over her face. Lowering her eyes, and in a voice so faint that he bent forward to catch it, she said:

"I think, on the whole, that I will tell you."

Then, turning away her eyes to avoid his own, she continued: "One evening, about this hour, a month or two ago, I was sitting in that old chair facing your port — your grandfather's portrait, — and I was wondering if the original of the face was as interesting as the picture."

"Really, did you do that?"

"But that was before meeting the

obnoxious American who happens to resemble it."

"That speech is more like you;" and he turned away and looked out the window.

"Well, as I sat there I saw, in the dim light, the edge of a note, and as I watched the little white point it came further and further out, as if slowly pushed from behind. I thought I must be dreaming, but there it certainly was, and no human hands were near it. You may think me silly, but I was frightened and left the room. I came back, however, mustered all my courage, and took it to my chamber. There were two lines, —

"'If in all this world there 's a girl like you,
Then count me a lover stanch and true.'"

As these words reached his ears, Cyrus bent forward in speechless astonishment with a look so strained and so eager that she stopped short in her story.

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Did you answer that note?" he asked, still bending forward with the keenest interest.

"Yes."

"And you tucked your answer in the frame yonder?"

"Yes."

"And you wrote,—

"'Thank you, but I have no mind
For a lover so perversely blind.'"

It was the young lady's turn to be surprised, and her eyes opened wide in amazement.

"Why, how did you know?"

"Because I received it in America. I found it in the corner of the portrait of yourself where I placed the first."

"*You* placed the first! *You* wrote it?"

"I did."

She took a step backward and leaned against the side of the window. With

her astonishment there was also a touch of fear.

"But, tell me," he said, "why you wrote 'perversely blind'? Why was I blind?"

"Because the stupid youth who sent the message had his eyes upon me all the time, and yet pretended to doubt my existence."

Cyrus smiled. "Of course! And I hardly slept that night for trying to guess what you meant."

"Then you wrote this one, too?" and she held forth the note that was just received.

He read it aloud, —

"Why do you say I am blind? Why give such a meaningless answer when you know I am in earnest? For me your face shall always be the first and dearest.

"Please answer. C. H."

Mystified, he looked into her face, then down again at the paper.

"Yes. I wrote it. These are my initials. Why did n't you answer?"

For a moment she was too much overcome to reply. Gazing at him in silence, she was wondering what inexplicable power had seen fit to concern itself with this affair. It was supernatural; so fairy-like and miraculous, so beyond her comprehension, that it brought a feeling of awe and a mild, indefinable terror. But when he repeated his question, she answered, —

"How could I? It was getting too serious, and I had no idea from whom it came. And, besides, to tell the truth, I was a little frightened. In fact, I am now," she added with a nervous laugh, "for it is all very mysterious. How do you explain it?"

Cyrus smiled and came a little nearer.

"By the intervention of an immortal messenger, — the little god who helps true lovers."

Again the color was in her cheeks, and that look about the mouth he knew so well; then a smile that set his pulse to beating faster.

"Perhaps you are right," she said, and held out her hands.

But the young man ignored the hands, and took the girl herself into his arms.

The Man Who Vanished

The Man Who Vanished

A CERTAIN hunter, clad in appropriate raiment, and armed with a fowling-piece of costly mechanism, sought diversion in a forest.

His first effort was a failure. The squirrel at which he aimed darted around the tree as the trigger was pulled, and looked down with an irritating expression. There was a look in his eye which seemed to say, —

"Not this time, smarty!"

And the movement was executed with a nervous twitching of the tail — itself an impertinence.

The hunter, a man of dignity and social position, was justly annoyed by this want of consideration, and he fired again. But the agile native continued

to keep the trunk of the tree between them. At last the hunter, disgusted by the animal's self-will, passed on for other game.

He had been reared by pious parents; and that one of the lower animals should thus take upon himself to oppose the will of man, created in God's image, brought a shock to his higher nature, and, for the time being, almost shook his faith in Providence. But this faith, a few minutes later, was re-established. Taking deliberate and careful aim at a noisy woodpecker, and pulling the trigger before the bird was aware of his presence, he brought him to the ground with his head nearly severed from his body. Leaning the gun against a tree, he stepped forward and picked up the corpse. By one of its legs he held it before him and admired its beauty; and there came a thrill of pride that he had done his work so well. As thus he stood, in silent contemplation, the crackling of a twig made him turn

about, and the thing he saw drove the blood from his cheeks. A large brown bear, erect upon his hind legs, his eyes on a level with his own, stood within a dozen feet, his arms akimbo, and a smile upon his face. A cold tremor crawled up the hunter's spine, as, with dilated eyes and fallen jaw, he took a backward step. One step only, and then he stopped, for his knees seemed giving way beneath him.

"That was a good shot," said the bear, with a pleasant nod, but his smile, although far-reaching and persistent, did not seem, to the hunter, the outward expression of an inward benevolence. "Had a grudge against him?"

The man tried to answer, but his lips were dry, and his tongue refused to work; so he shook his head.

"Noisy, perhaps, but he was a good enough fellow. I know his wife; a nice bird. She'll be sorry. But 't was a good shot, although you did take him at a disadvantage; eh?"

"I suppose I did," whispered the hunter, whose voice was hoarse and came with difficulty.

"Shot him because you are uncomfortably empty?" inquired the bear, still smiling, as he glanced at the generous waist of his companion.

"Oh, no."

"From public spirit, perhaps? You thought the world better without him?"

"No."

"Just for the fun of it?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, it's good sport. That is, of course, for the chap who holds the gun."

The sportsman stole a glance toward his weapon, which, unfortunately, was the other side of the offensive brute.

"Is n't it?"

"Er-what?"

"You seem nervous," and the creature laughed, his loose sides shaking as if something funny had been said. "You don't want that gun. It might

THE THING HE SAW DROVE THE BLOOD FROM HIS CHEEKS

go off and hurt something. We are safer without it." And he continued to smile. "You seem embarrassed," he said with another offensive chuckle. "I am afraid you are not enjoying yourself. You don't appear to possess a very fine sense of humor."

The hunter did not answer. He was considering the chances of making a dash to one side, then jumping for the gun. The bear seemed to divine this intent, for he laid a paw, with the claws out, on the gentleman's sleeve, saying in a cheery, conversational manner, —

"It's curious what a difference in results the position of a gun can make. If, for instance, you had held on to that weapon you would have bear's meat to spare, to say nothing of a splendid hearth-rug for next winter. Whereas now you postpone the bear's meat, and that hearth-rug will serve for my overcoat, and a warm one, too. Loose, perhaps, but a nice comfortable fit."

The hunter could not answer. His lips moved, but there was no sound. The stern voice that brought terror to all in his employ — and even to his own family — had fled to some remote corner of his interior, and refused to come forth.

"It must require some courage to march into the forest, armed only with a shot-gun, among all these blood-thirsty birds and squirrels. But then, of course, a hunter has to take chances."

There was a silence, for the man said nothing. He was trying to get his wits together, but it required all his intellect to keep his knees from letting him down.

"By the way, what 's the price of bear's meat this morning?"

"I don't know."

The man tried to edge away, but the claws were still in the sleeve.

"Excuse my reverting to it, but did you kill that woodpecker in self-defence?"

"No."

"Children starving?"

"No."

"From a general sense of duty, perhaps?"

"No. Just for sport."

"I am glad you approve of that sort of thing, as it gives me your own personal indorsement of a little plan of my own. I am something of a hunter myself."

"Yes?"

"Oh, yes! But I do it for business. I have a family to feed, and they are hungry now. When I left home this morning, I gave my word that I would bring a dinner or not return, and a fellow takes a big risk in getting between a hunter and his gun, especially when they are less than ten feet apart. By the way, what time is it?"

The hunter looked at his watch.

"How your hand trembles! Does it always shake like that?"

"No."

"Only when you are tired?"

"Perhaps," and his voice was a hoarse whisper.

"What you need is a rest; a good long one. But what time did you say it was?"

"Ten minutes of eleven."

"Why, we ought to dine at noon, and they expect me to bring the dinner. Won't you come and fill a place? I might say, fill several places." And again his sides began to shake. "I don't know how much of a diner-out you are, but you will never be of more service at a meal than you will to-day."

Then, placing his paw inside the hunter's arm, they started off. The host seemed amiable and tried his best, as they walked along, to engage his guest in conversation, but the man appeared depressed, and was silent. He simply answered questions until the bear inquired if he had a family.

"Yes, I have! a wife and two chil-

dren. Think of them if you have no consideration for me!"

They stopped, and stood facing each other, but there was always a paw on the hunter's arm.

"Are they starving?"

"No."

"But if they were starving and I had appeared in your front yard this morning, can you give me your word of honor there would not have been bear for dinner?"

"I don't know."

"No, I suppose not. But as my wife and three daughters are dying of starvation, literally fading away before my eyes, I know that you, as a father, will not blame me for supplying them with a square meal. And, by the way, if it were your good fortune to serve as a banquet for a nice family of bears — a thoroughly appreciative and grateful family — would it make any difference to you in what style you were brought on?"

The hunter licked his lips and wobbled his jaw, but he failed to answer, and they disappeared among the trees.

There was soon a great rejoicing in the Bruin family. And later on, having rid themselves of that goneness which is the inevitable result of meals too long deferred, they passed a fuller and a happier afternoon than they had known for many months.

This tale is not a sad one even from a human point of view, as the man was wealthy and very close, and his family, had he lived, would have derived little benefit from his money. Moreover, he was a bully at home and used to open his wife's letters.

THERE WAS SOON A GREAT REJOICING

A Bachelor's Supper

A Bachelor's Supper

WHEN one man has served another for twenty years as valet, chamber-maid and errand-boy, he not only acquires an accurate knowledge of his master's life and habits, but he forms definite opinions as to his inner man and past career. Moreover, there are few secrets he has not guessed at.

Old Clem knew Mr. Valentine had led a comfortable and uneventful bachelor existence during the last dozen years. He also knew, or rather had heard, that as a younger man he had tasted freely of life's pleasures; that his youth had been jolly and his manhood genial. Now, a handsome old gentleman of seventy, always courteous and sometimes merry, with a well-behaved

constitution and a sufficient fortune, he was gliding gracefully down the shady side of life. Although still an occasional diner-out, he seldom entertained in his own apartments and Clem was naturally surprised, the night before Christmas, on being told to have the table set for eight people at half-past eleven. It was then nearly ten o'clock.

"But, sah, dey ain't suppah for no eight people!"

"Never mind that, Clem."

"Never mind de suppah! Den whar 's de use in settin' places?"

"That 's all right, Clem; you just set the table, and put on the very best china. Put on the best we have of everything. It is a sudden idea of mine, — a little Christmas celebration, — and I want it as perfect as possible."

Clem's dark face expressed a mild disapproval, and he asked with a touch of irony, —

"Any wine?"

"Yes, put on one bottle of that old

Madeira," and then added as if to himself, "that is a ladies' wine."

"Ladies!" said Clem, and this time there was fearless disapprobation in his tone. "Is der to be nuthin' but ladies?"

But Mr. Valentine seemed to be drifting off into a revery, and made no answer. Clem waited a moment, then left the room. With serious misgivings he began the preparations for what promised to be an exceptionally unsatisfying banquet.

As Mr. Valentine sat before the fire, his clean-cut features and handsome eyes made it easy to believe the stories of his early successes with the gentler sex. Although over seventy, he retained the bearing and manner of a youngish man.

And now, in his big chair, the half-closed eyes shutting out the scene before him, he goes back some forty years to a certain ball-room on an eventful summer night. He takes her from the

other dancers out into the moonlight, down to the little boat-house. And then, just for the joke of it, she in her ball-dress, he in a swallow-tail, they get into a boat and row over to the island,

the music from the shore filling the air about them.

How long they stayed upon the rocks, how close they sat, or what he said to her or she to him, was never published; but when they wish to return, the boat is gone. He sees it floating down the

river a hundred yards away. Then there is a clinging scene, she in her ball-dress and he in his swallow-tail, and he remembers the moist eyes and quivering lips. He hurries to the lower end of the island, removes the swallow-tail, — and everything else, — and plunging in, strikes out into the black river. The current is with him, and he reaches the boat. But the pulling back! Now, in his old age, he wonders how he did it. Half an hour later they re-enter the ball-room, while the last dance is on. They also take a spin about the room, and no one suspects what has happened.

He rose from his chair, with a long sigh, and stepped into the dining-room where Clem had started a fire and put a leaf in the table. These serious preparations make him realize what a childish entertainment he is giving himself.

"'T is a tribute to *them*; and who knows if I shall see another Christmas? Moreover, if I choose to make a fool of myself, it is my own affair."

Clem entered with a large pasteboard box.

"Dis yer 's just come, sah. It 's flowers, I reckon."

"Ah, yes, those are the flowers. There are seven bunches in there, Clem. Put a bunch at each plate, except mine."

Clem retired to the kitchen; and as he laid the box in a cool place, he remarked to the cook, —

"Hope dey 'll like der smell o' dese yer flowers, for it looks mighty like dey was n't goin' ter git anything else."

Mr. Valentine in the mean time returned to his library and seated himself at an old-fashioned desk. From a little drawer he took a letter and a daguerrotype. The letter was yellow and considerably worn, with the appearance of having been opened and read and laid away a great many times. He placed it reverently before him and read once again the words he knew by heart: —

"SILLY BOY:

"*Do you take seriously everything a woman says?* L.

"P. S. — *To-morrow afternoon about half-past three a foolish girl on a bobtail horse will be in that lane between the bridge and Holbrook's farm.*"

At this point something fell upon the page which Mr. Valentine blotted up carefully with his handkerchief. Laying the daguerrotype upon the letter, he gazed silently upon the features of a raven beauty with gentle eyes and a most inviting mouth. As he laid the portrait and the letter back into the drawer, Clem appeared in the doorway.

"Sence dey 's ter be some style at dis yer suppah, p'raps it 'll be bettah ter have two to wait on de table. But as dey ain't no food and only one bottle of wine, I s'pose I 'll be enough."

"You 'll be one too many, Clem. I want you to go to bed after the table is set, and not be around at all."

"Not be around at all!"

"No, Clem."

"Den whose ter let de guests in?"

"Nobody — that is, I can do it myself if necessary."

As his servant departed, he muttered, "What an old fool he thinks I am."

And the guess was not wide of the mark. Old Clem was seriously alarmed; for although his master had never yet shown any of the usual symptoms of mental derangement, he knew those things often came suddenly and without warning. But he set the table with unusual care.

At precisely half-past eleven he knocked at the door of Mr. Valentine's chamber, and, receiving no answer after a second knock, he slowly opened the door. The old gentleman was lying upon the bed, apparently asleep. Clem noticed that he had donned a fresh shirt and a white cravat. As he touched his arm, Mr. Valentine slowly opened his eyes and at first did not seem to realize

just where he was. He arose from the bed, however, and there was a little flush in each cheek that made his pleasant old face look younger than ever.

"Thank you, Clem," he said. "I must have been asleep. I 'll be right out."

Five minutes later Mr. Valentine entered the dining-room in full evening dress, with a rose in his coat, a smile upon his face, and the same rejuvenating flush upon his cheeks. Clem was surprised to see how young and fresh the old gentleman looked. He also realized that while his color was most becoming, and came and went as with a girl of sixteen, it might be an unfavorable symptom with a man of seventy. But Mr. Valentine was in excellent spirits, although quiet and, at intervals, even absent in his manner. His eye was bright and his step elastic as he made the tour of the table, giving here and there a finishing touch. He compli-

mented Clem on his promptness and good taste.

"And now, Clem," he said, glancing at the tall clock in the corner of the room, "you may go to bed. And remember you are not to return to-night, or even look into the room."

Seeing upon the black face a reproach for being excluded from such an unusual festivity, he laid a hand affectionately upon his shoulder and added, —

"I may tell you about it sometime, but this little party to-night is to be so terribly select that not even the supper itself can be admitted. So go to bed, old fellow, and I wish you in advance a Merry Christmas."

"Same to you, sah; same to you, and a good many of 'em! Good-night, sah."

Alone in the room, Mr. Valentine filled the eight little glasses with the old Madeira. He then took seven cards from his pocket. On every card

was a lady's name, which he touched reverently with his lips before laying beside its proper plate. Then, with a thoughtfulness and care that indicated a familiarity with the preferences of his guests, he transposed all the bunches of flowers.

The last one to be laid in position was composed entirely of old-fashioned pinks. As he placed it on the table, a sudden idea seemed to strike him, and, taking one of these pinks from the bunch, he went back into his chamber to the chimney-piece and stood before the miniature of a young girl about eighteen, in a white dress of a fashion long gone by. The brown hair, parted in the middle and drawn down in straight lines across the forehead, covered the ears with a prim severity in striking contrast to the plump lips and laughing eyes. At her breast was a little bunch of the same old-fashioned pinks. For Mr. Valentine there were evidently sad associations with this

cheerful face, as his eyes were moist when he inserted his one little flower in the carving of the frame.

Returning to the dining-room, he stopped a moment upon the threshold, looking with boyish pleasure upon the dainty supper-table and the blazing fire. He then stepped to his own armchair at the head of the table, bowed his head in salutation to the absent guests, and took his seat.

The red spots were again in his cheeks. The flush of youth came and went more fitfully than before as he looked along the vacant places, and allowed his fancy to fill the seats with those who, at different epochs, had been so very dear to him. Verily, he seemed again in the presence of the seven beings whose hearts had once been his!

And they were not idle flirtations he looked back upon, but serious passions; for Mr. Valentine, although impressionable, was a steadfast man, and these

seven loves of his life had been honest and loyal. Moreover, there had always been a reasonable space between. When his heart went out to a new love, it still held firmly to the earlier idols and never weakened in its devotion.

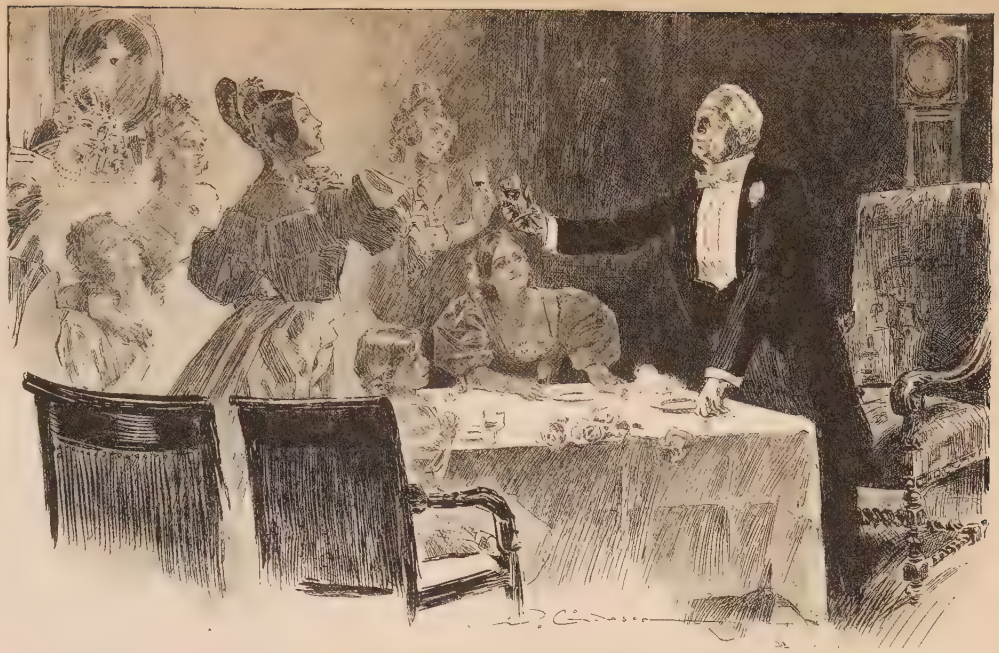
These memories gave him an exquisite pleasure, and for twenty years he had taken every care to keep them alive and fresh. They were the sanctities of a heart that could never grow old. And now, as he sat with the empty chairs about him, he was drifting back into the years of his victorious youth. He seemed again in the presence of those whose memories were more precious than life. There, on the right, with the quaint little curls each side of her face, is the one for whom he fought that laughable duel and got a bullet in his ribs; then lost her through a hot little quarrel for which he has cursed himself off and on for more than half a cen-

tury. But the kind eyes smile pleasantly at him now.

And beside her is the dear, familiar maiden of the bobtail horse, she who wrote the letters in his secretary drawer. The blood flows quicker through his veins as she, too, sends a loving greeting. He laughs to see the same old toss of the head he knows so well.

But that foreign, tempestuous beauty, with the pearls in her black hair, and the heavy eyelids — why is she here among these Americans? Has she also a corner in the old beau's heart? Of that there is little doubt. As her gaze meets his, he leans forward with an eager smile and his eyes drop to a necklace, where he sees, with a thrill of pleasure, a jewelled locket upon her throat. He knows well what lies within!

And *la diva!* She, too, is here! What a different life her face recalls! A life of music, flowers, applause. It recalls stolen interviews in those deli-



BUT THEY ALL UNDERSTAND

cious days before she was famous, and before she was given to that short little brute with the very long title. It also recalls that night he sat waiting for her behind one of the flies in the opera at

Genoa when she, coming off the stage in her regal robes, took his head in both her hands, and kissed him!

All the joy and tragedy of fifty years seems crowded in a single moment. He leans back in his chair, his hand-

some face radiant with unspeakable happiness. But the strain is almost too great, and he raises a trembling hand to his heart as if to keep it in its place.

He suddenly leans forward, however, with a bright welcome in his eyes as another place is occupied. This time by a little figure — a girl of ten or thereabouts — who lifts the flowers from beside her plate and smiles timidly over them. His thoughts fly back into a far-away past when he and this maid were all the world to one another. It was his first passion, his boyish love. Does she remember the day he dragged her up the hill upon his sled, and when at the very top he slipped and, falling in her lap, they sped like lightning to the bottom and were shot head foremost into a snow-bank? Oh, yes; she remembers it well, and nods her head! There is a tear upon his cheek as he thinks of the checkerberries he laid upon a young girl's grave; and the

cornelian ring he wore until it fell apart.

Another radiant creature fills an empty chair and gayly returns his welcome. She tosses him a rose, this girl of the boat and the island, of the moon and the music, and shakes her fan at him, the very fan that is locked up in his bureau drawer!

They are all here now except one — and — yes — even she is here! — the original of the miniature, the girl with the old-fashioned pinks. The same smile, the same eyes, and they tell him to-night, as they have done many times before, of a heart that knows no wavering. He draws a hand across his brow as if the pain and pleasure were too keen for nerves and tissues of seventy years.

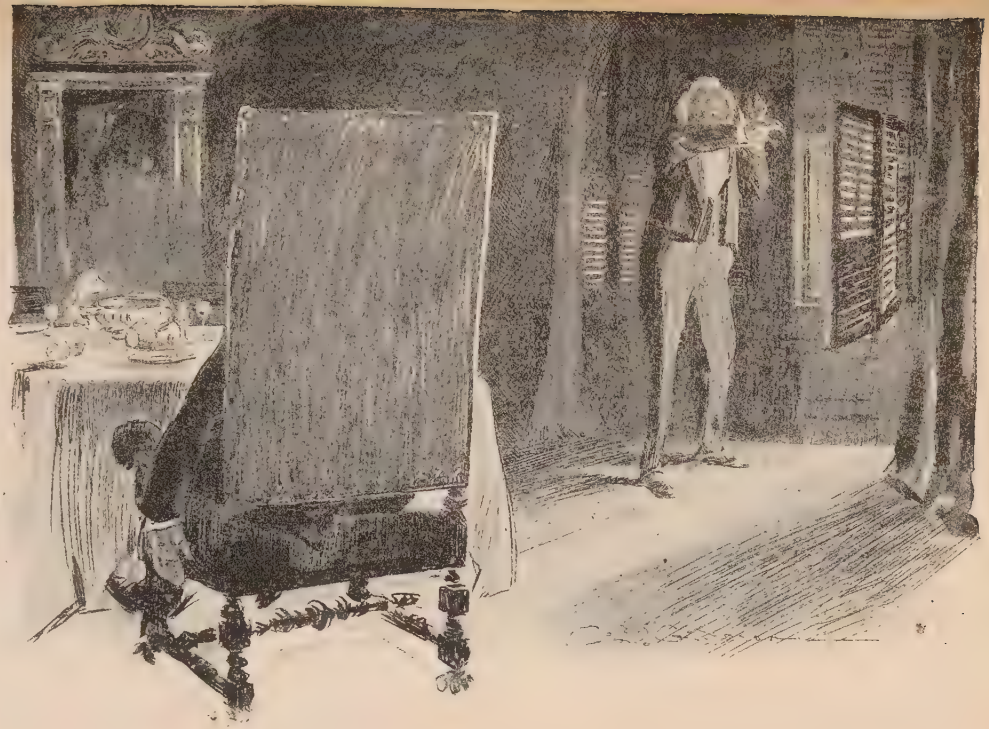
Slowly rising to his feet, he lifts the little glass of Madeira from the table, then looks around with a loving glance that meets, from every face, a loving answer. He tries to speak, and his

tremulous lips refuse to utter the toast, — the message from an overcrowded heart.

But they all understand. They respond with a graceful gesture, each with her own little glass, as he puts the wine to his lips.

At that moment the old timepiece in the corner, with its chimes and bells, begins to sound the hour of twelve; and, as he smiles upon the radiant forms about him, the wine, with a tumultuous beating, throbs hotly through his veins and surges to his brain, keeping time with the ringing clock. Then the sound grows fainter and fainter, as if dying away, and seems, with a drowsy rhythm, to lift him gently with it.

When Clem entered the next morning, two narrow bars of sunshine had crept between the curtains, faintly lighting the silent room. The candles had burnt out in their sockets, and his



WHEN CLEM ENTERED THE NEXT MORNING

master, his chin upon his breast, had sunk back into his final sleep.

The little wine-glasses were partially emptied, and the bunches of flowers were gone.

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